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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN RERUNS: ALL EYES ON VOTE COUNT AFTER
QUIET DAY OF VOTING

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Azerbaijan's May 13 rerun of ten parliamentary districts, canceled due to fraud in November 2005 elections, appears to be proceeding quietly in most districts. While minor procedural problems persist, we have seen little evidence of calculated fraud during balloting. Domestic observers were out in full force, invisible finger inking is being used, a USG-financed exit poll was conducted, and the mass media, particularly independent television channel ANS, provided coverage to the general public. Domestic observers, however, have reported that fraud may be occurring in several districts, including Zaqatala's 110, where Musavat Deputy Chairman Arif Hajili is running. It also appears that authorities have effectively organized voters in Jalilabad to vote for Fazail Ibrahimli (reftel) and international observers have witnessed ballot box stuffing in two constituencies. On the whole though, balloting has gone smoothly in the majority of polling stations. The true test, however, will be the conduct of the vote count. We will report separately on the vote count and coordinate information with other international observers and report septel. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) USG observers are observing in nine of the ten constituencies being rerun on May 13. The OSCE/ODIHR has a special observation mission based in Baku, led by Ambassador Geert Ahrens, who led the observation effort in November. The British and Norwegian embassies also deployed international observers. (The CIS also has an observation team here). Opening procedures reportedly went fairly smoothly, although a number of observers reported that the ballots were not counted in front of them. This was also a common problem in November. However, most polling stations opened on time and with little difficulty. While election commissions still seem somewhat unsure of some procedures, overall international observers reported that they are more confident in the process than in previous elections. Among the positive elements observed: Domestic observers were out in full force, invisible finger inking was widely used and in the overwhelming majority of cases, precinct commission members followed procedure, a USG-financed exit poll was conducted in all ten districts with little evidence of any interference, and the mass media -- especially independent television channel ANS -- provided regular coverage to the general public. ANS, for example, in its 6:00 pm news, offered details on alleged incidents of fraud, including reports from the Central Election Commission.

3. (SB) Polling stations once again are playing host to large numbers of domestic observers. While they do not seem to be creating the confusion they sometimes created in November, we have received reports of several confrontations

between commission members and observers. We have also heard reports that two observers were briefly detained. Polling stations are averaging upwards of 20 stationary domestic observers each, and international observers are crisscrossing each other throughout the four Baku-area districts.

¶4. (SBU) The most common procedural problems USG observers are reporting is inconsistent checking of invisible finger ink at the door of the polling stations and acceptance of Soviet passports as valid ID to vote. However, our observers are reporting overall that poll workers appear to be consistently checking IDs, for the most part are following inking procedures, and are allowing observers to watch the process, albeit from a distance. Voter turnout has been low throughout the day based on our observers' reports; we predict the final turnout will hover around 35 percent. The exception, however, is Sumgayit's Constituency 42, and Zaqatala, which have both seen almost double the number of voters of other areas.

¶5. (SBU) While overall the process has been smooth throughout the day, it is not without instances of fraud. Our observers have witnessed ballot box stuffing (Aghdam 119 and Sumgayit 42), voters being allowed to sign next to the wrong name (Baku 31 and Aghdam 119), family voting (Baku 9 and Sumgayit 42), and local government authorities or municipalities filming voting (Tovuz 103 and Baku 31). Our observers have also seen falsified signatures in Aghdam 119 and Sumgayit 44 precincts. A British Embassy observer reported that in one Sumgayit 42 precinct, he observed not only blatant indications of ballot box stuffing, but also reported that the precinct chairman hiding the voter list in his office and allowing a representative of the ruling party (YAP) candidate to direct the process. Our observers and British Embassy

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observers have also reported that in Jalilabad 69 and Tovuz 103, it is possible that voters have been instructed for whom to vote -- in Jalilabad, buses of voters are pulling up to polling stations and when questioned, the voters have consistently said that they are there to "vote for number seven!". In Jalilabad, a USG observer witnessed voters being bused in to polling stations by representatives of one of the candidates; the same candidate who allegedly is the "favored" candidate to win. Domestic observers have reported violations in a number of constituencies, including not being allowed to fully observe the process and multiple or carousel voting. Prominent human rights activists Novella Jafarova and Saadat Binanyarli reported to us that they were kicked out of one Zaqatala polling station and not allowed to enter a different precinct.

¶6. (SBU) Problems with voter lists appear to have returned this election. While still not pervasive, our observers are witnessing surprisingly high numbers of voters being turned away in some constituencies either because they are not on the list at all or their address is incorrect. While many voters do not seem to be going to the courthouse to get the situation rectified, USAID partner ABA/CEELI reported that the courts are busy (although not as busy as election day last November).

¶7. (SBU) Higher election commission officials, both from the constituencies (ConEcs) and the Central Election Commission (CEC) have been responsive to reports of fraud throughout the day. Our observers have noticed throughout the day roving teams of officials from the ConEcs and the CEC to check the conduct of balloting in precincts. In Aghdam 119, after Post informed the CEC of the fraud our observer witnessed, the CEC sent a team of officials to monitor the precinct. Domestic observers apparently mobbed the CEC team to report violations; the team was responsive to the observers, saying they knew about the violations and had come to verify the reports.

¶8. (SBU) In what appear to be the day's worst constituencies

-- Aghdam 119, Sumgayit 42, and Zaqatala 110 -- observers are reporting the mood is becoming increasingly tense between observers and election officials as balloting draws to a close. While other constituencies remain quiet, it is too soon to assess the conduct of the vote count in any of the constituencies.

19. (SBU) Balloting appears to have been successful in most areas. Our observers will monitor the vote count through to the end and follow the ballots to the ConEc offices. We will also remain in close contact with other international observers throughout the night. First reports from the USG-funded exit poll are expected to be posted on the Internet around 9:00 pm local time (IRI.ORG.AZ/EXITPOLL). The international community, including OSCE/ODIHR, will hold an informal internal debrief on the morning of May 14 (local time), after which we will update the Department through a phone call to the Operations Center. A reporting cable will follow on Monday with a more complete picture of election day and its aftermath.
HYLAND